

The University Library and Its Services to Students¹

IN PREPARING to meet the educational needs of the returning veteran, the universities of America set up scores of courses which would teach rapidly and efficiently what educators sometimes call "marketable manipulative skills." These courses were designed to teach the veteran how to make a living and to teach him this as rapidly as possible in order to help him make up for his lost years. Naturally, the veteran would not care where he learned his trade, once he learned it, and for this reason the largest increases in enrolment were to be taken care of by adding technical and professional courses in most existing schools of every type.

What actually has happened in the case of the returning veteran has made some of us question whether those years could properly be classified as "lost," for while the returning veteran, to as great or even greater extent than anticipated, is seeking an education, he is in astonishing numbers passing up the opportunity to learn a mere skill rapidly—a fact proved by his unwillingness to take advantage of the types of course provided for him and his unwillingness to obtain that education just anywhere. He is, much to the surprise of most educators and certainly of the Army, very much concerned with where he receives his education and even more deeply concerned with what that education is to be. No, the years cannot properly be termed "lost" if out of them have come an insistence upon knowing

"why" and an apparent dissatisfaction with merely knowing "what."

As you will recall, the literature of higher education a few years ago was filled with what amounted to last and desperate stands defending the liberal arts in general and the humanities in particular. In the light of present enrolment figures these defenses appear to have been superfluous; for the returning veteran is, to the capacity of the institutions, requesting a course of study which would gladden the hearts of those who put understanding before knowledge. He is, in addition, attacking the problem of understanding with enough vigor and success to raise the academic standing of the total campus, presenting therefore an opportunity to many institutions to elevate their formal academic requirements.

This veteran influence is being felt so thoroughly throughout the universities that already it is possible in many cases to classify the total university as being preponderantly "why" conscious rather than "what" conscious, an extremely hopeful situation as regards the educability of the university student of the present and immediate future. It means at least this much: the university student in greater preponderance is more eagerly seeking to be an educated man than at any time in the memory of most of us. Now librarians have always claimed, and legitimately, that they were constant sponsors of this total education and that they could, with books, meet the needs of it. The principal question in the past has been who is to provide the impetus to start the

¹ Paper presented at the meeting of the Association of College and Reference Libraries, Buffalo, June 18, 1946.

student in motion or, more specifically, who is to inspire the student to want to read the books which will give him this total education. Some have said that this is the function of the faculty; others, of the librarians; and some have agreed that perhaps it is an obligation of both. If this first year's experience with the veteran in the university offers dependable evidence, the question of who is to provide the impetus or inspiration may well be shelved while we deal directly with methods of meeting the already overwhelming demands on the faculty and library. I say overwhelming not solely because the universities have been temporarily unable to find housing, classrooms, and faculty rapidly enough or because the librarians are unable to seat and furnish with a book enough of the students, but rather because I am willing to concede that the existing facilities of the universities, including their libraries, are nowhere nearly ready to meet the demands now being made upon them by a student who would be totally educated.

It is not necessary to list here all the curricular devices designed in recent years to offset the specialization necessary as equipment for the college graduate of today. I do think it might be recalled to your minds at this time that the divisional system was, at the outbreak of the war, rapidly becoming the most popular approach to the problem; whether or not it was the most valid is for others to say. The university library, in its effort to keep up with the curriculum, had already begun to experiment with a divisional breakdown in the library, more or less matching a similar change in the curriculum. But by nature of its being a service agency within its institution, it must follow rather than lead. In the average university which had adopted the divisional plan in one form or another, the library had made little or no effort to rearrange

its collections and to reconsider its services in the light of the curriculum of its institution. As a service agency, it would seem the library must adjust to the curriculum of its institution even if the curricular experiment is invalid; otherwise, the institution would never know whether or not its experiment had had a fair trial.

We arrive, then, at one concrete method by which the library may adjust itself to the changing needs of the university student. The collections and services of the library and the attitudes of the library staff must be adapted to changing curriculums more rapidly and more efficiently than in the past, if the library is to assist materially in readying a university student for life in the atomic age. Many of us will freely admit that at the present time the arrangement of our collections, the type of services offered, and the attitudes actually encountered by the student in the library are not entirely in harmony with the educational philosophies, curriculums, and experiments present in our respective institutions. Whether or not the university library is entitled to carry on its own educational system in the face of a totally different one on the part of the institution is highly conjectural. There is, however, one aspect of student education which can best be carried on in the library and by the librarians. The close association of related ideas and the fitting of these ideas into their proper background can be most economically accomplished by showing the relation of one book to another by various devices of arrangement, display, and bibliography. This aspect of university education has so long been considered the library's responsibility that in our search for new ways in which we can help educate we have sometimes not been on the alert for new opportunities and methods to help meet this old obligation. In this respect the increasing doubt con-

cerning the lasting value of formal classification may be considered an encouraging note.

The third manner in which the university library can help meet the needs of the university student of today and tomorrow is to redefine its fundamental responsibilities so as to include the preservation and presentation of recorded knowledge. While the term "audio-visual aids" is not descriptive enough to cover everything that might be included in this redefinition, it will serve to illustrate what is meant here by redefinition. The university library will not want to delay much longer in deciding whether or not it will accept responsibility for nonbook teaching materials, for, if the library does not accept them very soon indeed and on a much broader scale than has yet been done, other agencies will be found to preserve, organize, and serve materials which are in many cases undoubtedly more efficient recording and teaching devices than the book has ever been or ever will be. Norman Cousins' article, "Modern Man Is Obsolete," which so took the fancy of librarians, stated that there must be many more years spent in acquiring an education or there must be no education at all. There would seem to be one possible solution short of the two extremes offered by Mr. Cousins, and that is that a speeding up of the educational processes might be effected, and by speeding up I do not mean here frantic concentration nor four-quarter attendance, but rather employment of the more efficient teaching methods. Undoubtedly, these more efficient teaching methods will involve recorded knowledge in some form less cumbersome than the printed book. This must be so, at least, if the university student is to acquire in fewer than thirty years even the beginnings of the education Mr. Cousins advocates as an alternative to chaos.

Three concrete methods have been presented here which are believed to constitute

important and valid devices by which the university library can meet the ends of the university student in the atomic age. It would be absurd to claim that these three devices are the most important three devices which might have been considered, and it would be even more ridiculous to claim that they are any more than three of what might well be an extensive checklist of desirable devices for consideration. But they are, nevertheless, thought to be particularly pertinent to the topic assigned. The first part of this paper can be summarized, then, by simply restating the three points that have been under consideration: first, the desperate and almost universal need for each individual university library taking its cue on collections, services, and attitudes from its own university's educational philosophy rather than from pure library science; second, the equally desperate but perhaps less universal need for reminding the university library that it still has the primary responsibility for certain types of student education, particularly that of showing relationships (may I say here that ideally education's greatest internal struggle could be easily solved if the library could indeed manage to show relationships, leaving the faculty to pursue the specific; but perhaps this is too much to hope for even in an idealistic state); third, a redefinition of the functions of the library to include without reservation all recorded knowledge except artifacts, specimens, etc., and the organization and representation of that knowledge, in order to facilitate the teaching process which is as indubitably on the verge of a new age, atomic or otherwise, as is the capture, control, and release of energy.

Several peculiarities surround most people's thinking concerning the atomic age for which these university students are being prepared. In the first place, almost no one is willing to call it the atomic age, but rather

the age of the atomic bomb. This is deeply significant, for those who think of it as the age of the atomic bomb will confess that they believe that because of the atomic bomb there will be no atomic age, or perhaps any kind of age—an attitude which makes Mr. Cousins' throwback to the Stone Age seem a relatively pleasing alternative. Not only may there be no age, they say, but it may well be there will be no earth, in the present sense of the word, upon the face of which an age might be in progress. Now I would like to speak of the atomic age without the necessity of bringing in the atomic bomb, treating it after the fashion of some of our committees as a thing which, if ignored, will go away. My mind is no more willing to accept the idea of the atomic bomb going away from Oak Ridge than it is ready to accept the idea of Oak Ridge itself going away.

It is indeed unfortunate that with the atomic age must also come the atomic bomb, but we had better concern ourselves with what is instead of what we wish were so. The place of the university student and the library in the atomic age would be a wholly delightful subject were it not for the bomb and, I might add, bacteriological warfare and all the other unpleasant methods of destroying the peoples of the earth. Were it not for the bomb we could look upon this new age as being inherently good, we could continue to spell progress with a capital letter, and we could otherwise identify ourselves with anyone's endeavor to push back further the unknown. In this comfortable capacity as librarians aiding progress at every turn, we could continue to do our daily task without too much questioning and could remain, as far as we knew, men of goodwill. But it is doubtful if men of goodwill can continue much longer to aid indiscriminate progress along certain lines, and we are confused as to

which lines are which. We have prided ourselves upon the fact that we were ready to aid anyone in his particular endeavor. We do not want the responsibility for labeling a project good or bad before deciding whether or not as librarians we are willing to participate in it. It has taken a long time for us to learn that we must not be censors, and now, just as we have learned that lesson very well indeed, it would seem that we will have to become censors all over again and in a yet stricter sense, or else be party to endeavors which have as their aim solely the destruction of mankind. This is a very distressing state of affairs. We have learned to aid everyone at every turn and have prided ourselves upon our ability to do this dispassionately. Now we discover that we have assisted materially in our own potential self-destruction. As I have already said, if only we could consider the atomic age and leave out the bomb, how very much more pleasant we could be about it.

To say that all this will eventually work itself out is tantamount to saying that, if ignored, the bomb *will* finally go away. Comforting as this thought may be, we can hardly permit ourselves to depend entirely upon it. However, it is equally absurd to say that we can do nothing about it. The answer regarding what we can do is not a very novel one, since it is the answer to most problems concerning people—that is, education. The disturbing element here is that we are told we have so little time in which to educate. At this point I should like to go back in our thinking to the depression and recall that many university librarians, along with many other kinds of people, thought it would be too uneconomical to attempt to educate everybody and that the only practical solution was to educate through the schools, which, as day follows night, would eventually mean that everyone was educated. At that time the

term "adult education" meant to many people what we would now call continued education rather than education of the non-educated. Few of us can escape the accusation that as university librarians we proceeded plutocratically and had not too much patience with the problems of universal education, and even went so far as to take pride in the fact that we were not familiar with the problem. Concerning this I should like to say two things: first, that universal education would obviously have been relatively economical; and second, that it is revealing to discover the number of university and research librarians who have arrived at a full awareness of the damages already done and the future damages inherent in an impatience with the problem of educating everyone.

The correlation between universal or adult education and the university student and his library may not be too readily apparent. But some of us who have discussed this specific problem with more seriousness than is our ordinary custom seem to have agreed that the correlation does exist and that it is constructed of two parts. *First*, in this system of universal education no opportunity to educate may go unheeded. To the university librarian this means that even the poor student must at least *know*, even if he cannot *understand*. The university librarian's problem is still a relatively simple one in that those for whose education he is partly responsible are segregated and reachable. But the university library operating toward an ideal of universal education cannot in good conscience afford to be merely available to those who seek it out. It will have to seek out *all* the students. *Second*, if the university library is to assist in maintaining any semblance of an orderly

world in which its university student is to live, it—which means its librarians—will have to reach far beyond the immediate student body and embrace a much larger segment of humanity than has ever been its practice heretofore.

When and where and to what extent this extra-obligation embracing should take place should be determined by each individual, whether or not he is in a university library or, for that matter, whether or not he is a librarian at all. For the obligation of all of those concerned with the university student goes beyond merely educating him; the student must also have an educated or at least an understanding total world society in which to operate. The time indeed is short unless all educational agencies are willing to go beyond a rigid interpretation of their strictest and most limited obligations.

The research which has gone into the preparation of this paper has been of only one type—interviews and discussions with the university student who is in the atomic age. It is not too surprising to find that, a preponderance of evidence contrariwise, he is determined that this world be held together long enough to give him at least a chance to do something with it. And it is my contention and conclusion that at worst it will not even be here for him to live in or, at best, he will be unable to live rationally within it unless we blast entirely from our thinking the idea that the people can get along without help until we have educated a new crop of atomic age university students, who will then straighten everything out for us, allowing us to die peaceably among our cabbages—or however it is philosophers are supposed to be allowed to die—with dignity and at a very ripe old age.